

# FREEDOM

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## HOT AND COLD UNIONS

### Strong language but lacklustre action across public sector over job woes

There is mixed news on the industrial front as the economy tumbles into recession and job losses reach an eleven-year high. NHS Unite trade union workers including health visitors, hospital chaplains and pharmacists have voted to take industrial action in protest against this year's pay rise.

Members voted by 76% to 23% to take part in industrial action short of a strike. There was a 53% vote in favour of strike action. The union said "Our members were appalled and angry at the 7.99% three-year pay deal imposed by the government in the spring. Inflation has now broken through the 5% barrier and their household bills are increasing on an almost daily basis."

However the union has said that "the door is still open" to negotiations and have ruled out strike action because of the impact on patients. Despite a number of other NHS unions rejecting the deal no others have balloted for action leaving Unite isolated.

Even though the majority of National Union of Teachers members voted for industrial action in defence of decent pay, the NUT

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### LENS CAP GERMANY



Campaigners in Germany make their point in flames as they campaign against the dangerous transporting of highly radioactive nuclear refuse from German reactors to La Hague in France and Sellafield in Britain for processing, earlier this month.

Photo: de.indymedia.org

## MIGRATION CRACKDOWN

A series of major changes to immigration have been brought as the first foreign nationals start to use ID cards which will limit job and marriage prospects for huge numbers of people.

From 25th November, foreign nationals will be forced to give the state their fingerprints and pay to be given an ID card, which will then be entered into a database of all migrants currently in the UK and used to track their movements.

Companies and institutions which use migrant labour will then have to 'sponsor' them during their stay, and report to the government if they go missing from work for any length of time – effectively meaning a constant monitoring system. Some groups have already balked at being asked to

effectively work as informants for the state in this way (see page 4).

Days later, on 29th November, the points-based system of migration is to come into force. This will effectively bar foreign workers from taking 200,000 roles in the UK, and strictly control the numbers allowed for 800,000 more.

The jobs listing, modelled on the controversial Australian points system, could criminalise up to 70,000 migrants annually as they are banned from working and from entering the country.

At the same time, young people who wish to marry are to be barred from doing so by the imposition of an increase to the minimum age of marriage, from 18 to 21, starting at the end of this month.

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## NEWS

## IN BRIEF

**FIRE SERVICE:** There has been a sharp increase in firefighter deaths in the last five years, according to a new report from the Fire Brigades Union. From February 1996 until October 2002 there were no recorded firefighter deaths at fires in the UK. However in the last five years (2003-2007), at least 13 firefighters have been killed. The FBU believe a combination of lack of training, poor policies and poor risk management have been the primary cause of the problem.

**HEALTH:** Campaigners have warned the Government announcement allowing patients to 'top up' their NHS treatment by buying drugs privately could drive a wedge into the principle of an NHS free to all, delay drug approvals and hurt patients needing expensive treatments. Geoff Martin, of NHS pressure group Health Emergency, said: "We understand why people would blow their life savings to fund drugs denied them by the NHS but this policy shift is fraught with danger and could turn the clock back to the days before the NHS when your life chances were decided by your ability to pay."

**HOUSING:** Squatters living in a £6.25 million mansion in Mayfair, Central London, have set up a website detailing properties they have taken over. The group, DA!, claims to take over unused buildings to use as a base for parties and art exhibitions.

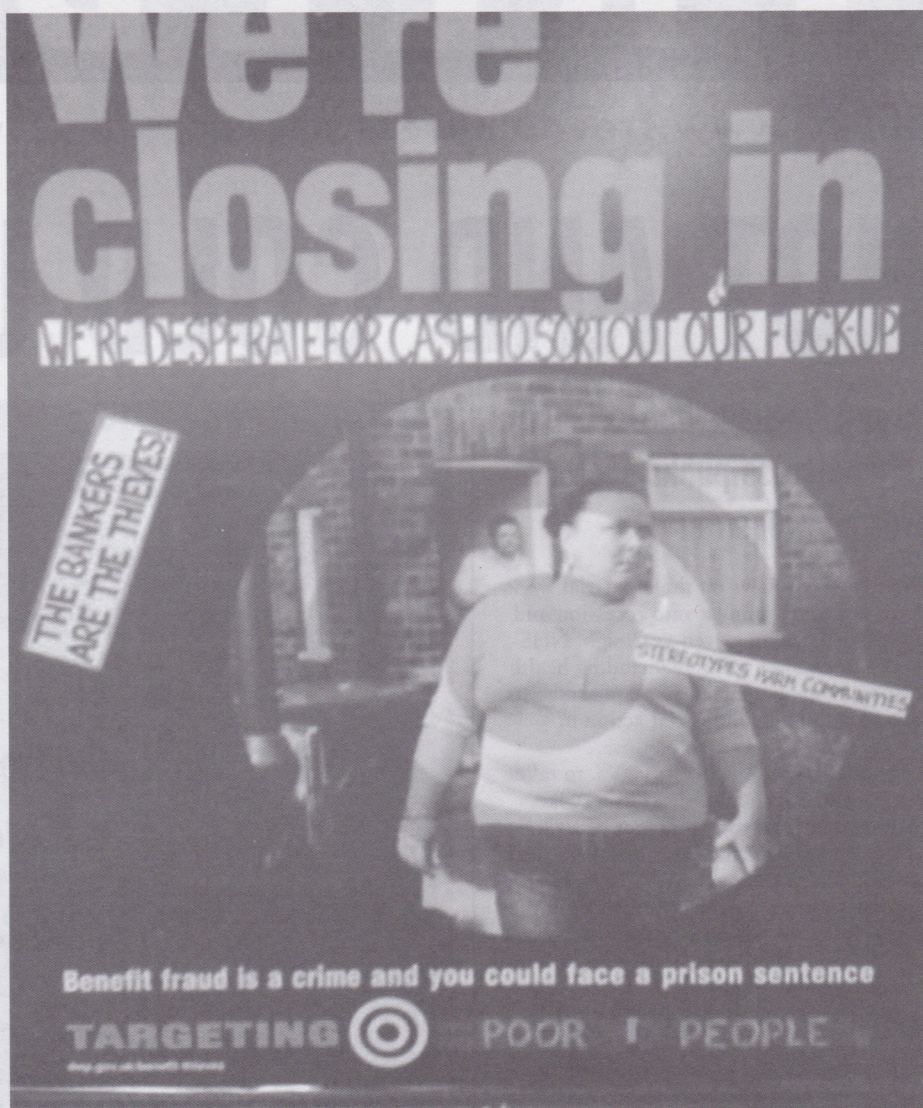
**INTELLIGENCE:** The Earth First! eco-action group has come under fire after an article by an ex-army officer suggested that the non-violent network could carry out a fatal terrorist attack. Members fear this could be the start of heavy crackdowns. The group have already come under attack in the US, with dozens arrested and sentenced to up to 20 years for involvement in alleged arson of vehicles at highly-polluting companies.

**SURVEILLANCE:** 'Black boxes' would be used to collect and store huge amounts of raw data monitoring internet traffic, under new government plans unveiled at a meeting between the Home Office and Internet Service Providers. The proposal is expected to be put out to consultation as part of the new Communications Data Bill early next year.

**UNIONS:** In-fighting has reportedly reached new levels at the top of the Unite union as the Amicus and T&G leaderships continue to clash. Derek Simpson was rebuked by Tony Woodley after likening union organisers to SS troops, while ex-Treasury figure Charlie Whelan has sparked a possible strike by union employees after allegations of bullying from his subordinates.

**WORKING HOURS:** The UK's working-week opt-out may be set to go after Labour MEP Stephen Hughes defected to support a move by the European Parliament's employment committee to scrap it. Parliament will vote on it next month.

## LENS CAP LONDON



As the government continues to spend large amounts of money advertising against benefit fraud and on a major crackdown, this subvertising appeared on Stockwell Road, London. The subvertising group said of the adverts, which have been organised for the Department of Work and Pensions, "these ads are horrible and everywhere. Let's do them all!"

## Tyne and Weary of privatisation

Despite widespread public disquiet, Nexus, the public sector body which runs the Tyne and Wear Metro system, has invited bids from private contractors to run the rail service on its behalf.

The PTE has placed a notice in the *Official Journal of the European Union* asking for expressions of interest to be sent by December. Metro is a light rail network of 60 stations used by 40 million passengers a year serving the cities of Newcastle and Sunderland and the surrounding area.

The news has come as a bitter blow to campaigners, who have highlighted the fact that under public ownership it has consistently outperformed private rail companies and provided a superior service.

The campaign to keep Metro in public hands was recently stepped up after it was

revealed that it has the support of three in four people across the area.

The research for Keep Metro Public by pollsters ICM follows the distributing of tens of thousands of leaflets across the system by trade unionists and activists, who say the service, which is the best-performing in the UK and also the last to remain in public hands, is unlikely to benefit from privatisation.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "The recent turmoil in the financial markets has shown that big business is only interested in trying to make a quick profit regardless of the impact on society and people's livelihoods."

"Be in no doubt that the fragmentation and privatisation of the Metro will lead to attacks on jobs, conditions and pensions."





# Voices of dissent on Obamania

Following the victory of Barack Obama in the presidential race, a number of libertarian groups have voiced strong concerns about the new leader's likely policies in the near future.

The president's selection of senior staff has caused particular comment, with his staff including:

- Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, a known anti-Palestinian.
- Attorney General Eric Holder. Holder is currently defending big four fruit dealer Chiquita Brands International against dozens of workers and trade unionists.
- Foreign policy adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, a hawk and ex-Carter administration bigwig.
- Foreign policy adviser General Merrill McPeak, a supporter of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor.
- Foreign policy adviser Dennis Ross, a supporter of the Israeli West Bank occupation, advocate of military action in Iran and ex-supporter of the neo-conservative Project for a New American Century.

## Hot and cold unions

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executive has in an astonishing move decided not to go ahead.

Despite a 52% vote in favour of strike action the union has backed off doing anything more than encouraging members to write their MP.

An NUT member who works in east London told *Freedom*, "I'm actually surprised there was a majority in favour. The union has done nothing to build on the successful one-day strike back in May – that's seven months ago. Most members couldn't see the point of another one-day strike, they want full out action. They are fed up with bad pay. They are fed up with the teaching unions not uniting and they are fed up of being let down by a timid leadership."

- General Colin Powell, long-time Bush patsy and senior co-architect of US foreign policy for the last eight years.

Meanwhile his second-in-command Joe Biden maintains one of the most radical views of how to carve up Iraq of the entire US senate.

Biden believes all oil should be privatised, and the country should be partitioned into three statelets – Sunni, Kurd and Shia – governed by US-friendly groups and allowed to pass their own oil laws, signing contracts independently. In theory, this would create a 'competitive environment' where oil companies could play off the statelets against each other and force them into a race to the bottom in selling off their reserves.

Obama's views are barely less hawkish. Although he voted against the Iraq war, he did so for tactical reasons only and, at present, intends to expand ground forces by over 100,000, diverting Iraq forces to the 'good war' Afghanistan, rather than bringing them home.

On the eve of a national civil service strike in November, the PCS union suspended a planned action in response to government requests for further talks. Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said "our national industrial action has been suspended for 28 days. I welcome the dialogue and hope an agreement is possible". The union has been pressing, for over a year, for a range of demands including consolidated basic pay increases at least equal to the retail price index, the removal of pay progression costs from budgets for increases and fewer separate pay negotiations. Militants are concerned that the suspending of industrial action will open the door to a compromise deal.

He has said he will "never take a military option off the table" with regards to Iran. He believes in military intervention in Pakistan, and will continue to support the embargo on Cuba as, in his words, "an important inducement for change". He believes in further financing the controversial missile defence system and has no intention of cutting the vast US military budget.

On the home front, Obama has declared his opposition to gay marriage, and wrote in his memoirs that he thinks the death penalty is acceptable in cases "so heinous, so beyond the pale, that the community is justified in expressing the full measure of its outrage".

*Freedom* columnist Louis Further said: "The fuss over the election of Barack Obama began to die down by mid-November. The first signs that he will, of course, be no different from any of the other figures of the capitalist elite became clear pretty quickly."

The decision by both the NUT and PCS to halt industrial action has taken the pressure off the government, which has been able to find billions to bail out the banks but refuse to find the money to pay public sector workers a decent wage. There have been no indications from the government that they will soften their line on pay.

"The trouble," an IWW education member told *Freedom*, "is that the unions are divided within sectors and across the public sector. We have one union in health voting for strike action but no one else balloting. Their action isn't coordinated with other unions. This weakness is a godsend for the government."

Richard Griffin



## PUBLIC SECTOR

# Scrapping secure tenancies

## Major changes to council housing

Campaigning groups have hit out at plans to convert council housing from a secure-tenancy arrangement to being a last-resort available for only the most hard-up families.

The Defend Council Housing campaign and homelessness charity Shelter are among the diverse groups which have condemned Housing Minister Margaret Beckett for seeking to implement her plan, which many originally thought was just pie-in-the-sky thinking.

Under Beckett's rules, rather than having assured tenancy tenants would instead be given fixed-term contracts of as little as three or four years, and would be regularly checked to see if they still qualify for their homes.

If their financial situation improves, they would be evicted and told to either move into private sector accommodation, part-purchase the house or face rent increases. Eviction could also become a weapon for the Department of Work and Pensions, with the right to a council house becoming conditional on having or provably looking for a job.

In a bid to undermine resistance to the move, changes are likely to only affect new tenants, effectively forcing people to either stay where they are or face a precarious future and denying their children the right entirely.

A spokesman for the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), which has driven the scheme, said no-one would be evicted from their homes under its plan, but they could face higher rents.

Alan Walter, tenant chair of Defend Council Housing said: "This is yet another attempt



to stigmatise council housing as housing of last resort just when we need pressure on Ministers to announce a massive investment programme to build a new generation of first class council housing providing the secure tenancies, low rents and an accountable landlord that the private market has so clearly failed to deliver.

"With so many people facing insecurity today the last thing we need is the 'great and the good' of the housing world proposing to take away 'secure' tenancies which council tenants fought for and won after the recession of the late 1970s.

"The solution to a shortage of defend, affordable, secure and accountable council housing isn't to means test and time limit it

but to build more! That would also have the benefit of opening up council housing allocation policies to the wide range of people who used to live on council estates re-establishing the mixed and sustainable communities the CIH and government say they want."

The plan was originally brought up by neo-liberal think tank the Smith Institute in 2006, under the argument that a secure tenancy encourages 'dependency'.

At present the government takes £1.8bn a year out of council housing rents, while subsidising Registered Social Landlords – non-government groups which run social housing projects on a semi-private sector basis – to the tune of £20bn.

## 'Spying' on foreign students opposed

A storm had blown up over plans to force universities to put students from outside the EU under permanent surveillance throughout their stay, with lecturers being asked to act as informants for the government as part of their role.

The rules would require all universities to sponsor their students, who will be forced to give their fingerprints and take ID cards if they are to stay in the country, as well as give evidence that they have the money to cover their fees for the entire duration of the course.

Lecturers would then have to monitor attendance of the 350,000 students Britain currently takes from overseas each year, and report anyone who misses more than ten seminars.

Triggers would also be installed in university systems, noting when students are not logging onto computer and email accounts, failing to swipe library cards, and non-

submission of assignments.

The government say the new measurements would help crack down on 'bogus students' who fail to finish their courses and drop off the grid upon their entry into the UK.

However around 200 lecturers, unionists and activists signed an open letter attacking the measures, which it is said would create a two-tier system of trust among students, and jeopardise the £2.5 billion brought in by overseas students every year in fees alone.

It has been pointed out that as exams and essays are not optional, students who drop off the course are quickly noticed, and the new measures would barely improve on detection times.

There are also a number of reasons why students may drop off the books – including overseas work which would make it impossible for them to attend lectures or even contact the university for long periods.

## Government cuts NHS spending

While NHS trade union Unite worries about the effect of a proposed industrial action on patients, the government has no such qualms about whether it hurts patient care.

A couple of years ago the NHS made a small loss and was made to pay the price for this. As *Freedom* reported at the time, jobs were lost, wards closed and treatments delayed. Last year though the NHS made a surplus of a staggering £1.7 billion. The government promised that this money would be used to boost patient care. Not any more. The NHS will now see just £400 million of this. Even worse, next year, the Treasury are to reduce the amount of money planned for primary care trusts (PCTs) by £950 million. PCTs 'buy' services from hospitals. So despite making a £1.7 billion surplus last year, next year the NHS will actually have less to spend. Hospital trusts anticipate having to reduce non-clinical staff bills by 3%, either through freezing posts or redundancies and closing beds.



## IN BRIEF

**FINANCE:** The Unite trade union has condemned Lloyds TSB for announcing 59 redundancies at the company's insurance group, based in Newport, Wales.

**MANUFACTURING:** Jaguar Land Rover, which has factories in the Midlands and on Merseyside, says it is seeking another 300 to 400 job cuts on top of the 200 it announced last month.

**PORTS:** Hundreds of Unite members at the Dover Harbour Board took part in a rally and demonstration and were set to go out on a 48-hour strike as *Freedom* went to press, to demand that their jobs not be outsourced.

**RAIL:** Any threat of forced redundancies of RMT members at London Underground and TfL will be resisted. The union said it was alarmed by an announcement that 'hundreds' of jobs could be lost as part of a drive to find £2.4 billion in efficiency savings.

**RETAIL:** Hundreds of jobs are likely to go at Homebase after the company said that it was expecting to make major cutbacks "in line with trading conditions". Rival group Focus said earlier this month that it was cutting 15% of its workforce, laying off 750.

**ROAD:** A strike over pay by Stagecoach bus staff in the Highlands and north east of Scotland is back on after union members were balloted again. The T&G Unite union re-balloted staff following last-minute talks with the company saw earlier action suspended. The strike, planned for 21st and 24th November, is expected to affect bus travel for school children.

**STEEL:** Industry giant Corus has announced that around 400 people are to go from its Distribution and Building Systems Division, as demand for steel drops due to low demand in construction and manufacturing. Community, representing the workforce, has expressed 'disappointment' but no action will be taken.

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS:** Virgin Media is to cut 2,200 employees, about 15% of its workforce, by the end of 2012. The company, which employs about 14,600 staff, said it intends to make most of the cuts between the fourth quarter next year and the end of 2010.

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS:** BT is axing 10,000 workers, or 6% of its global workforce, with several thousand expected to go in the UK as the company looks to cut costs and reduce its reliance on contractors in the face of the global economic downturn.

**TRANSPORT:** First Group and its shareholders are profiteering at the expense of passengers and transport workers, the RMT transport union said as the group published its half-year figures showing a £55 million dividend bonanza.

# Cement cartel cracks

Companies from around the world, including several UK subsidiaries, have been raided after allegations came to light of cartel activity in several major cement manufacturers.

Holcim-owned Aggregate Industries, HeidelbergCement-owned Hanson, Lafarge Cement UK and Cemex UK have been raided by Office for Fair Trading (OFT) and European Commission investigators.

The Commission said that it had "reason to believe that the companies concerned may have violated EC Treaty antitrust rules that prohibit cartels and restrictive business practices".

"Commission officials were accompanied by their counterparts from the relevant national competition authorities," it said.

A previous such enquiry across Europe found 42 firms guilty in 1994. This would be the first time UK companies have been specifically targeted

The EU has used an amnesty system which allows whistleblowers to remain unharmed by penalties in exchange for naming cartel members. However any investigation is likely to take years, and investigation in cartels and monopoly practice is feared to be taking a nosedive as governments across the EU give companies leeway in the midst of the recession.

Already, mergers such as Lloyds and HBOS, which would have been blocked as monopolistic even under current weak UK laws, have been pushed through. Investigations into the raising of supermarket food prices while suppliers are forced to make up the shortfall of higher production costs are also looking unlikely in the near future.

Fines from investigations into cartel behaviour are notoriously light, and many are overturned in lengthy and highly expensive lawsuits.



## State bailing out PFI?

PFI groups have been anticipating a surge in new initiatives on the back of the recent governmental bank bailout as finance markets are freed up and the government considers major new state interventions to shore up regional economies.

PFI, where the government signs long-term contracts with the private sector for major infrastructure projects, effectively taking out a mortgage with them which can last for thirty years or more, has come under increasing pressure as the financial sector contracts. The companies, which have relied on the easy availability of credit to fund their part for the deals, have been finding it more difficult to bring in money to pay for the major infrastructure projects as existing work becomes more difficult for the govern-

ment to fund and the viability of new projects became more precarious.

However Treasury officials have reportedly been mulling over allowing government departments to put in their own money as bridging loans to companies, effectively taking on the entire risk of the project until it is shown to be stable enough to be tempting for the private sector, who would then step in.

The controversial initiative would effectively wipe out a major plank of the argument for PFI, which is that private companies take on the financial risk of large infrastructure projects in return for long-term contracts from the government.

Among the projects mooted for such a tactic is the M25 widening project.



## INTERNATIONAL

### IN BRIEF

**CHILE:** Thousands of public sector employees in Chile began a two-day strike on 11th November to demand higher wages.

The country is currently suffering its highest inflation rate in 14 years, which hit 9.9% in the 12-month period through October – is the highest pace since 1994. Prison workers, health workers and teachers took to the streets of Santiago in a series of protests against President Michelle Bachelet's unpopular ruling centre-left coalition, leaving schools, health facilities and other public services shut down.

**MEXICO:** On 9th November, a mob evicted a family of adherents to the Zapatista's Other Campaign from the land where they've lived since 1973. The confrontation started when the group began work to construct a road through land occupied by Other Campaign supporters in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. The adherents consider the construction of the road to be a pretext to evict them because the construction crew was accompanied by surveyors who came to measure the property's boundaries in order to sell the land. The move is part of a broader series of encroachments against the Zapatista's and their supporters in recent months.

**POLAND:** While the Polish government hosted a plush ball to mark national independence day, hundreds of anarchists gathered in the streets of Warsaw under the banner 'Capitalism is sinking, enjoy your last dance'. To celebrate 90 years of independence presidents from the Baltics, Balkans, Ukraine and Georgia were invited to the ball along with high-ranking officials from other 'aspiring' countries like Turkey.

One organiser explained that "when early pensions and other benefits for working people are being done away with, and we are being told we cannot afford this. The state wastes millions on shows of patriotism and attempts to show off its military might and present itself as a regional superpower. While millions suffer from lack of basic services, the president decided to throw a gala ball."

**USA:** Baristas at a Starbucks coffee shop in Minneapolis walked off the floor to present a petition to management, signed by over 500 concerned customers and community members, demanding Starbucks hire a security guard to ensure the safety of its patrons and partners. Their action marks the expansion of activity by the IWW Starbucks Workers Union to a second store in the 'Twin Cities' after baristas at the Mall of the America started taking action for improved working conditions over the summer.

Since the beginning of 2008, there have been more than 500 police reports filed for the immediate area around the Starbucks. Staff say they can't work when we are constantly being harassed, threatened, and intimidated, or trying to protect customers from the same mistreatment.

### LENS CAP ISRAEL



Photo: Oren Ziv / Activestills.org

Israeli and Palestinian activists protest outside the recruiting station in Tel Hashomer army base supporting Raz Bar-David Varon and Sahar Vardi, two conscientious objectors refusing to serve in the military. Raz and Sahar were detained in military prison later that day. They are part of the 'senior letter', an announcement written by Israeli youths who refuse to go to military service, in protest against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Speaking on the day of her arrest Raz explained; "Today I am about to refuse serving in the Israeli army. I have witnessed this army demolishing, shooting and humiliating people whom I did not know. I wasn't born to serve as a soldier who occupies another, and the struggle against the occupation is mine too. It is a struggle for hope, for a reality that sometimes feels so far away. I have a responsibility for this society. My responsibility is to refuse."

## USA today, the world tomorrow

While Americans, and indeed the rest of the world, have been subjected to a year long unending wave of news reports on the US presidential election, thousands of New Yorkers and citizens in dozens of other US cities, awoke the morning after Obama's victory to find that *USA Today* had, overnight, taken a radical shit to the far left.

Unimpressed with both the Republican and Democratic parties and their candidates for President, as well as the corporate owned and controlled media's take on events, activists across the United States wrapped over 30,000 issues of *USA Today* with a special edition cover featuring the headline 'Capitalism Wins At the Polls – Anarchy Brews in the Streets'.

Containing tongue in cheek news stories

ranging from the cancellation of the World Series, due to lack of oil to fuel the team buses, to a bank robbery in Washington DC in which all the counties white, middle aged, tie-wearing men were being treated as suspects. The four-page special edition *USA Today* also featured serious articles on the ills of capitalism; the horrible reality of the prison industrial-complex; the economic crisis and the bailout entitled 'This isn't a Bailout, This is a Stick Up'.

Anarchist Amanda Heron explained, "The media in this country is biased and supports the status quo. Every person who picks up a copy of *USA Today* this morning, that has this special cover will read a different view, a more truthful and honest take."

wheeler

## Notes from the United States

Called variously 'propositions', 'amendments', 'initiatives', or 'measures', a series of votes were held on 4th November in many states in a party-independent context. In some way they offer those who choose to vote a restricted opportunity to have a small say on issues which can make a difference to lives.

These initiatives tend to receive less attention outside the United States. They are far from wholly democratic both because they are rarely framed, worded or managed by the wider public; and because they are as distorted by the same fraud, subversion and corruption

as is the rest of the election system in the United States.

But they can be useful indicators of trends and occasionally may be said to represent the will of the people; although of 2,216 initiatives voted on since the system began, only 902 have passed. This year most such Ballot Initiatives were on a dozen or so issues including education, energy, health, immigration, taxes, gender and reproductive rights.

One type of measure ostensibly brought forward by 'citizen petition' which progressives

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# Prisoners protest

## Prisoners go on mass hunger strike to protest against living conditions

Over 5,000 Greek Prisoners are taking part in a mass hunger strike protesting the severe overcrowding and terrible living conditions they are forced to endure.

In addition to the hunger strike another estimated 6,500 inmates are refusing to eat prison meals but accepting food from friends and family during visits.

In an open letter to the Greek minister for justice the National Prisoners Committee stated that they have entered this struggle as citizens claiming their rights.

"Our fellow prisoners' participation has overcome every hope and every previous mobilisation," the letter stated. "We want to manage our struggle ourselves. To speak in our name, with our name. We ask for our elected national prisoners committee, which are the real representatives of the prisoners, to meet with the minister.

"The meeting can take place in Korydallos Prison, and we ask to help the persons of the committee be transferred there."

A letter detailing their demands with a deadline of three weeks was distributed threatening a collective hunger strike if they were not met by 7th November.

The list of 16 demands ranged from the abolition of juvenile prisons to free circulation of political and educative press with heavy focus on bringing about alternatives to imprisonment.

The protest began in October with prisoners boycotting meals and forming informal



networks and committees to co-ordinate their activities.

The prisoners have been receiving support on the outside from the broad Greek anarchist movement who have organised marches, occupations and acts of sabotage in solidarity with the struggle.

Greece has a prison population of 13,000 spread across 24 prisons, which are only designed to hold a total of 8,000 inmates, according to official government figures. It is believed that as many as one third of these prisoners are being held without trial and prisoners demands for less time in pretrial detention have received popular support from human rights groups.

Prisoners say that prisons fail to provide even basic health and sanitation facilities and offer little opportunity for job-training.

Dozens of prisoners, including some drug addicts, were transferred to hospital after the first week of the strike, while around 20

inmates sewed their mouths shut in Trikala and Amfissa prisons.

Meanwhile outside the prisons on the streets of Athens immigrants have been joining anarchists erecting barricades to defend themselves against attacks from riot police at the central immigration offices in Athens. In the early morning of Saturday 8th November 2008, riot police forces attacked immigrants queuing outside the immigration office.

In the last attack of the kind in October, one Pakistani man was killed, with two more passing away days later in the hospital.

Resisting the police onslaught the immigrants blockaded the avenue running past the office, effectively shutting down one of the main east west arteries of the Greek capital.

Speaking after the attacks police claimed they were trying to organise the asylum seekers into an orderly queue.

weeler

## Notes from the Unites States

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are likely to wish hadn't passed was to ban gay marriage. Voters in California, Arizona and Florida passed initiatives (by 52 to 48, 56 to 44 and 62 to 38% respectively) effectively discriminating against same-sex couples.

Massive marches in protest have already taken place in the larger Californian cities – including one in Los Angeles before election night was even over. In Arkansas ('Initiative 1') voters decided by 57 to 43% to prevent gay couples from adopting children.

Also in Arizona 'Proposition 202' preventing the hiring of undocumented guest workers was passed by 59 to 41%. Again in California, 'Proposition 7', which would have authorised up to \$5 billion (£2.75 billion) in incentives to buyers of high fuel-economy and alternative-fuel vehicles, was rejected by 35 to 65%. The measure would also have approved incentives for developing renewable energy technologies and fuels.

Not all measures were regressive, however. Significantly, voters in Colorado rejected a move ('Amendment 46') to end affirmative action, albeit by a narrow margin (51 to 49%) – although a similar measure was successful in Nebraska ('Initiative 424', by 58 to 42%). Initiatives further restricting the availability of abortions failed – in South Dakota (by 45 to 55%) and Colorado (by 27 to 73%); and in California 'Proposition 4' obliging physicians to notify the parent(s) or guardian(s) of minors fell (by 48 to 52%).

Washington voters approved the state's 'Initiative 1,000' by 58 to 42%; it allows terminally ill, competent, adult residents of the state to request and self-administer lethal medication prescribed by a physician, provided that person requesting to end their life can be medically predicted to have six months or fewer to live.

Louis Further

## Sweet victory for sugar workers

Over 18,000 Colombian Sugar workers were celebrating their victory in a bitterly fought 56-day-long strike as bosses gave in to their demands. They have won an average 15% wage increase, a limitation on the working day of eight hours and a maximum of two hours overtime, replacing the 12–14 hour shifts previously worked. In addition to this they will now receive employer contributions to sick pay, and employer commitments to housing, education and social security for workers and their families. There will be stricter controls on weighing of harvested cane, a procedure through which workers have in the past been routinely robbed.

The right-wing government claimed the strike was being led by FARC guerrillas, but workers rubbish these claims. Riot police had been repeatedly sent in to break up the strike and union leaders were intimidated and harassed throughout the struggle.



## FEATURE

# The grand bluff: private profits,

## Iain McKay explains the cost of believing big business

With the financial markets in a panic, the calls for bailouts have increased – and the Bank of England has responded with a huge rates cut, while Brown has underwritten banks to the tune of billions.

Yet this seems to directly contradict one of the key defences of capitalism and its tendency to produce profits for the few – namely that such inequality is the result of ‘risk taking’. For capitalists, taking profit from others’ labour is fair because as owners they took a gamble in providing startup cash.

According to capitalist theory, those who take the risks should pay the price. Yet, when push comes to shove, the socialisation of risk – where society pays for failures either through state aid, consumer losses or through attacks on social institutions like pensions – is always there.

This is because, it is claimed, the impact of letting huge institutions – like banks – fail would harm everyone. Strangely, though, during the good times the impact of inequality was ignored. If the few benefit the many can go hang; if the few are threatened, then the many must pay.

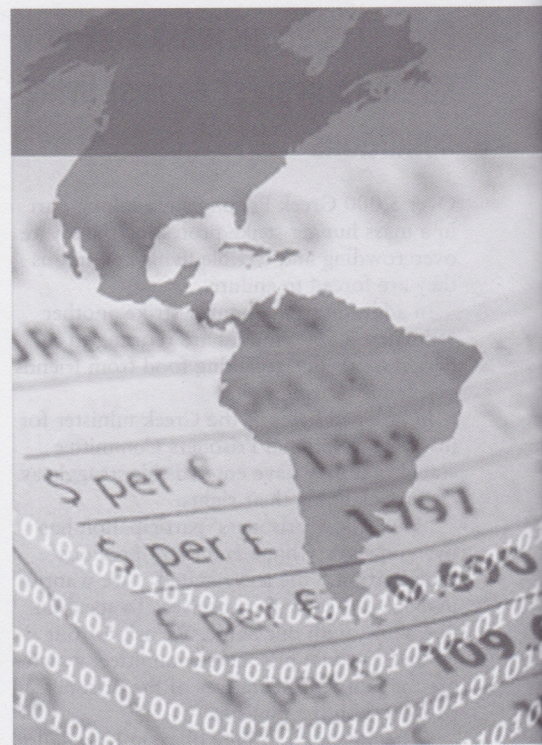
This is something capitalism is built on, not some kind of unusual event only applicable in bad times. Most kinds of ‘risks’ within capitalism do not contribute to production and, thanks to state aid, not that risky.

Appeals to ‘risk’ to justify capitalism are somewhat misleading given the dominant organisational form within it – the corporation. These firms are based on ‘limited liability partnerships’ designed explicitly to reduce the risk faced by investors. As Joel Bakan explains, before the introduction of LLPs: “no matter how much, or how little, a person had invested in a company, he or she was personally liable, without limit, for the company’s debts. Investors’ homes, savings, and other personal assets would be exposed to claims by creditors if a company failed, meaning that a person risked financial ruin simply by owning shares in a company.

“Stockholding could not become a truly attractive option ... until that risk was removed, which it soon was. By the middle of the nineteenth century, business leaders and politicians broadly advocated changing the law to limit the liability of shareholders to the amounts they had invested in a company. If a person bought \$100 worth of shares, they reasoned, he or she should be immune to liability for anything beyond that, regardless of what happened to the company.”

Limited liability’s “sole purpose ... is to shield them from legal responsibility for corporations’ actions” as well as reducing the risks of investing (unlike for small businesses). (*The Corporation*, pages 11 and 79)

This means stock holders (investors) in a corporation hold no liability for the corporation’s debts and obligations. It is, in effect, a state granted privilege to trade with a limited



chance of loss but with an unlimited chance of gain.

This is an interesting double-standard. It suggests that corporations are not, in fact, owned by shareholders at all since they take on none of the responsibility of ownership, especially the responsibility to pay back debts. Why should they have the privilege of getting profit during good times when they take none of the responsibility during bad times? Corporations are creatures of government, created with the social privileges of limited financial liability of shareholders. Since their debts are ultimately public, why should their profits be private?

This reducing of risk is not limited to individual states, it is applied internationally as well. Big banks and corporations lend money to developing nations but “the people who borrowed the money (i.e. the local elite) aren’t held responsible for it. It’s the people ... who have to pay (the debts) off ... The lenders are protected from risk. That’s one of the main functions of the IMF, to provide risk free insurance to people who lend and invest in risky loans. They earn high yields because there’s a lot of risk, but they don’t have to take the risk, because it’s socialised.” (Noam Chomsky, *Propaganda and the Public Mind*, page 125)

Capitalism has developed precisely by externalising risk and placing the burden onto other parties – suppliers, creditors, workers and, ultimately, society as a whole. To then turn round and justify corporate profits in terms of risk seems to be hypocritical in the extreme, particularly by appealing to examples of small business people whom usually face





# social risks



the burdens caused by corporate externalising of risk.

Doug Henwood further notes in this context that the “signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts for little or nothing as a source of finance,” making the argument for risk as a defence of profits seem extremely weak. (*Wall Street*, pages 293 and 292)

As David Schweickart points out: “In the vast majority of cases, when you buy stock, you give your money not to the company but to another private individual. You buy your share of stock from someone who is cashing in his share. Not a nickel of your money goes to the company itself. The company’s profits would have been exactly the same, with or without your stock purchase.” (*After Capitalism*, page 37)

“In spite of the stock market’s large symbolic value, it is notorious that it has relatively little to do with the production of goods and services,” notes David Ellerman. “The overwhelming bulk of stock transactions are in second-hand shares so the capital paid for shares usually goes to other stock traders, not to productive enterprises issuing new shares.” (*The Democratic worker-owned firm*, page 199)

In other words, most investment is simply the ‘risk’ associated with buying a potential income stream in an uncertain world. The buyer’s action has not contributed to producing that income stream in any way whatsoever yet it results in a claim on the labour of others.

New wealth flows from production, the use of labour on existing wealth to create new wealth.

In fact, the stock market (and the risk it is based on) harms this process. The notion that dividends represent the return for ‘risk’ may be faulted by looking at how the markets operate in reality, rather than in theory. Stock markets react to recent movements in the price of stock markets, causing price movements to build upon price movements. According to academic finance economist Bob Haugen, this results in inherently unstable finance markets, with such price-driven volatility accounting for over three-quarters of the spikes and dips reported.

This leads to the market directing investments very badly as some investment is wasted in over-valued companies and under-valued firms cannot get finance to produce useful goods. The market’s volatility reduces the overall level of investment as investors will only fund projects with a sufficiently high level of return. This results in a serious drag on economic growth. As such, ‘risk’ has a large and negative impact on the real economy and it seems ironic to reward such behaviour.

Given that the capitalists (or their hired managers) have a monopoly of decision both as buyers on the market through their superior information and buying power, and within firms, any risks made by a company reflects that hierarchy. As such, risk and the ability to take risks are monopolised in a few hands.

If profit is the product of risk then, ultimately, it is the product of a hierarchical company

structure and, consequently, capitalists are simply rewarding themselves because they have power within the workplace. In other words, because managers monopolise decision making (‘risk’) they also monopolise the surplus value produced by workers. However, the former in no way justifies this appropriation nor does it create it.

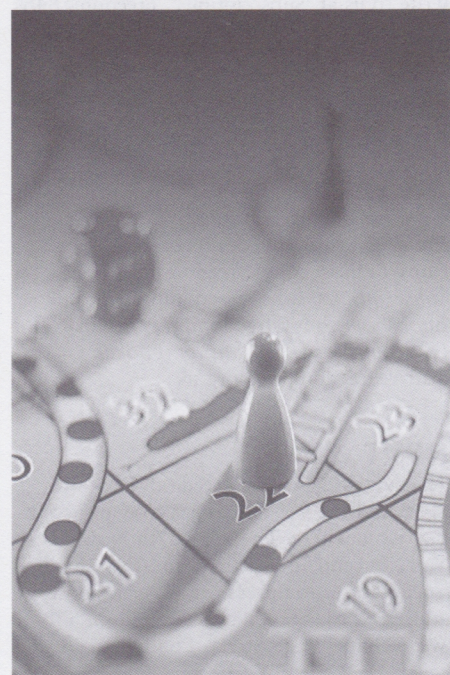
As production is inherently collective under capitalism, so must be the risk. As Proudhon put it, it may be argued that the capitalist “alone runs the risk of the enterprise” but this ignores the fact that capitalist cannot “alone work a mine or run a railroad” nor “alone carry on a factory, sail a ship, play a tragedy, build the Pantheon”.

As production is collective, so is the risk faced and, consequently, risk cannot be used to justify excluding people from controlling their own working lives or the fruit of their labour.

The most serious consequences of ‘risk’ are usually suffered by working people who can lose their jobs, health and even lives all depending on how the risks of the wealthy turn out in an uncertain world. As such, it is one thing to gamble your own income on a risky decision but quite another when that decision can ruin the lives of others.

With the panics in the finance markets, now is an ideal time for anarchists to argue that running an economy based on allowing the few to control, gamble and profit from the labour of the many is not only immoral, it does not work.

We need a society which is not based on bribing the rich to ensure investment and economic development. We need, as anarchists have long argued, an economy in which those who do the work control both it and its product.





## COMMENT

## ABOUT FREEDOM

## ANGEL ALLEY

There's lots going on at the moment in Angel Alley, with the moving of the shop to a new and improved space downstairs now almost finished at last following some truly outstanding work by various collective members.

It's hoped that the place will be ready to go by the end of the month, which may, possibly, lead to some sort of Grand Opening night. If you spend a bit of time down there more may become clear!

On the book front, we are in the final stages of two major releases. *William Blake: visionary anarchist*, by Peter Marshall, looks at the life and works of the great eighteenth century artist, poet and rebel. The Blake book will be back in a month or so, just before Christmas with any luck.

Meanwhile *Mutual Aid: a factor of evolution* by Peter Kropotkin, which is to feature additional material by Iain McKay and Donald Rooum, is due out in January, but may get here earlier.

We are also hoping to progress online, after a long period in which our service was, frankly, a bit patchy. With a new webmaster and an upgrade which will make it easier for our non-techie members to update it, we're hoping to get all of our new releases up for sale, and eventually start bringing some of the *Freedom* newspaper archives into the digital age. No promises, but watch this space.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

If the number above your name on the address label is 6921 or earlier, then your sub is due for renewal. See page 16 for the sub rates and renewal form or, if you don't want to worry in future about renewals, ask us to send you a standing order form either by email at [subs@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:subs@freedompress.org.uk), or write to us at 'Subscriptions', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

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## NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 6th December 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 27th November. You can send your articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

## A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

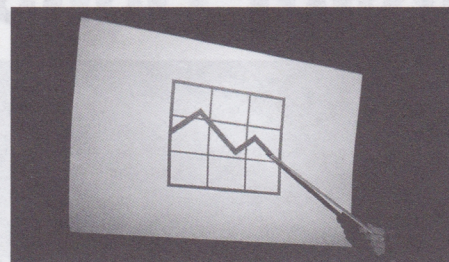
The current financial crisis has led to government intervention, both here and in the US, in the banking sector. Northern Rock was taken into state ownership just over a year ago, then in September this was followed by Bradford & Bingley. In October, the US government took stakes in nine of the country's biggest banks, while British and European governments have also taken stakes in theirs.

All this has been trailed as 'nationalisation' by many commentators, from both the left and right. In the US, the extreme right mainstream media typified by the likes of Fox were put on a back foot in their attacks on Obama during the presidential campaign. While they were laughably calling him a socialist, it turned out that his policies on the economy involved less nationalisation than that paragon of socialism George W. Bush! The *Daily Telegraph*, of all papers, wrote that state ownership was no longer "the unpalatable solution for wayward individuals like Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley, but a logical fix for the whole industry".

Of course, most of these commentators make a major error: to confuse nationalisation with any form of socialism, as long as we understand socialism to mean a system run in the interests of workers.

For a start, the nationalised Northern Rock has a repossession rate more than double the industry average. It is still paying staff bonuses of up to 60%, and these are in part funded by increasing repossessions. The Labour government is telling banks that repossession should be a last resort. Just because a bank is owned by the state it does not mean it is immune from the dictates of the market.

This is echoed across the pond where George W. Bush said the moves taken in the US were "not intended to take over the free market but to preserve it". For once he's probably telling the truth. The free market



has always needed periodically bailing out – and judging by the noises coming from President-elect Obama there's going to be a lot more bailing in the next year.

At the heart of it, however, all nationalisation does is exchange a private-sector boss for the state. The state may have a more strategic view, but it will still run as a business, albeit one that can sustain more losses than a regular private company. In so doing, it will recruit executives and managers from private sector companies, do deals with compliant unions and try to get rid of any worker who questions the dictatorship of the boss.

Much of the left believes that nationalisation is better for the working class – I don't think this stacks up. Yes, it is sometimes harder for the state to attack workers because of the higher union density; but that hasn't always been the case and won't last. In 1984–5, when I first became an anarchist, a nationalised industry attacked its workforce with such vehemence that a bitter strike ensued, that left the country's most militant union fatally wounded and workers on the back foot for over two decades. Ask the miners if state control was so good.

Or indeed the dockers, postal workers, fire brigade, ambulance workers or anyone else employed by the state who have seen the full weight of it against them in their disputes.

## Blog Bites

(from [nation-of-duncan.blogspot.com](http://nation-of-duncan.blogspot.com))

This is something which should get the blood boiling of any decent, law-abiding patriot.

In a town where 80% of the population is foreign, two immigrants who, by their own admission, barely speak the local language and yet formed their own political party to promote immigrant rights have seized control of the council.\*

They are literally taking over.

The town is described as a 'ghetto' with the traditional local culture eradicated in favour of establishments serving foreign food and drink. Other reports reveal that half of primary school kids are now foreign and don't speak the language.

Surely, someone is calling for immigration to stop and repatriation to begin? An ancient part of Europe is in danger of being destroyed forever by this invasion!

No wait, the town is San Fulgencio on the Costa Blanca in Spain and the immigrants are British expats.

I guess that's alright then.

Britain may be full up but there is plenty of room for Brits on the heavily-developed Spanish coast.

\* British expat Mark Lewis and his fellow expat Mick Blake took control of the San Fulgencio council after someone tipped off the authorities to rampant corruption within the town authority. The 58-year-old has lived in the area for 25 years and admits he is only able to speak broken Spanish. His case was approvingly reported in the *Daily Mail* as one of 'last man standing' – the only senior politician in the town not to be hauled away by police.



## Scotland interviews

Thanks for the informative and inspiring interview with anarchists in Scotland (13th September), but I have to quibble over one thing. Having been involved in Scottish anarchism since the late 1980s until my current exile in a somewhat uncivilised nation to its South, I have to object to the idea that the 'hegemony' of class struggle anarchism is a recent thing. I can attest that anarchists in the 1980s and 1990s were predominantly class struggle in orientation, not to mention from the 1890s to the 1940s. I cannot testify to trends between the 1950s and 1970s, but suffice to say the Scottish movement produced (amongst others) Stuart Christie.

Perhaps that particularly sub-section of class struggle anarchism named 'platformist' was meant, but rest assured class struggle anarchism has always been the predominant form in Scotland. Still, a minor point to another wise excellent interview and I hope the Scottish movement continues to grow and strengthen!

Iain McKay

## Bakunophobia

Peter Gibson's letters (*Freedom*, 19th July) have left me somewhat perplexed. He seems to have a bee in his bonnet about something, but I'm not sure what. He complains about 'Bakunophilia' in *Freedom*, something I fail to see as Bakunin is rarely mentioned. I can only assume by that term he means 'revolutionary anarchism' and so he seems to be complaining that a communist-anarchist journal is, well, presenting communist-anarchist analysis!

But better Bakunophilia than Bakunophobia! His hatred of Bakunin seems to know no bounds, as he invents a quote to justify his dislike. If Bakunin really had written that his secret organisations would "seize power, overthrow the State and instigate anarchism" then I'm sure that Marxists would have been quoting it for some time. Equally, while Marxists may think that Bakunin aimed for secret dictatorship anarchists, surely, should be expected to know better? After all, Bakunin explicitly stated that the secret organisation "rules out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control". He repeatedly stressed this, thus indicating that the role of the revolutionary organisation was not to 'seize power' but rather to spread anarchist ideas, encourage popular self-organisation and help the people liberate themselves.

I could go on, but this should be well known by anyone who has studied the subject (e.g. anarchists!). It seems that Gibson is as ignorant of Bakunin as he is of Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* and sociobiology.

Somewhat ironically from a fan of Max Stirner (real name, Johann Kaspar Schmidt), Gibson seems to have an issue with nom de plumes. He states that we as such use our real names, otherwise we should "stick with the establishment". Aye, right. Being made unemployed is a real worry for people and,

unsurprisingly, they do not wish to make it easy for those in power over them ('the establishment') to identify them. Bakunin was well aware of this: he was, after all, sentenced to death, commuted to solitary confinement and then exile to Siberia for his activities. That would, for most sensible people, explain his passion for secret organisations – and why even in relatively democratic states many choose to use hide their real names.

Gibson suggests that we anarchists would benefit from reading Stirner. Indeed they would, but his confused letter will surely put them off. He complains that "our behaviour is not determined by reason. To suggest it is [is] self interested propaganda". He then immediately suggests that we are "controlled by self interest" so suggesting that praising instinct over reason may be problematic. He states that most anarchists "cannot get their heads around the idea that we are driven not by intellect but by biology" which is good coming from someone who does not understand the difference between a selfish gene and a selfish individual!

He is clearly unaware of the rich work that confirms Kropotkin's arguments that natural selection favours co-operative activity. Robert Trivers, who independently came to the same conclusions a mere 70 years after Kropotkin, noted that a "very agreeable feature of my reciprocal altruism, which I had not anticipated in advance, was that a sense of justice or fairness seemed a natural consequence of selection for reciprocal altruism. That is, you could easily imagine that sense of fairness would evolve as a way of regulating reciprocal tendencies." If Trivers had consulted

Kropotkin, he would have discovered that his unanticipated feature had been discussed in *Mutual Aid*. Which suggests appeals to (biology) cut both ways for, as Kropotkin continually stressed, co-operation is just as natural as competition.

So our actions are influenced by biology, but not controlled by it. As Kropotkin explained, "the relative amount of individualist and mutual aid spirit are among the most changeable features of man. Both being equally products of an anterior development, their relative amounts are seen to change in individuals and even societies with a rapidity which would strike the sociologist if only he paid attention to the subject, and analysed the corresponding facts." That is why *Mutual Aid* is subtitled *a factor of evolution!*

Gibson claims that the "problem for anarchists is that they cannot demonstrate that anarchism would give other people ... more than they have got". We must, apparently, appeal to their 'self interest' but not their intellect. Ignoring the awkward fact that people generally think before concluding what is and is not in their self-interest, it seems strange that Gibson thinks that the communist-anarchist argument that by co-operating together as free individuals we can increase both our freedom and our access to the resources we need somehow does not appeal to our self-interest. For, as Johann Kaspar Schmidt put it, "the civic proprietor is in truth nothing but a propertyless man, one who is everywhere *shut out*. Instead of owning the world, as he might, he does not own even the paltry point on which he turns around."

Iain McKay

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## GETTING ACTIVE

### PRISON NEWS

Current prisoner lists  
Ploughshares

- Helen Woodson #03231-045, FMC Carswell-Max, POB 27137, Fort Worth, TX 76127, USA.

Serving eight years ten months for actions that focused on the interrelationship of war and the destruction of the natural world. The actions included pouring red paint over the security desk of a federal court and making threatening communications.

#### The Lecce defendants

The Lecce Defendants have been charged with 'subversive association' for allegedly damaging Esso petrol pumps to oppose the War on Iraq, sabotaging the cash machines of a bank which funds an immigration centre and targeting the multinational company Benetton in support of Mapuche land rights activists in Chile. All of the defendants are currently either under house arrest or on bail.

#### Antifa prisoners

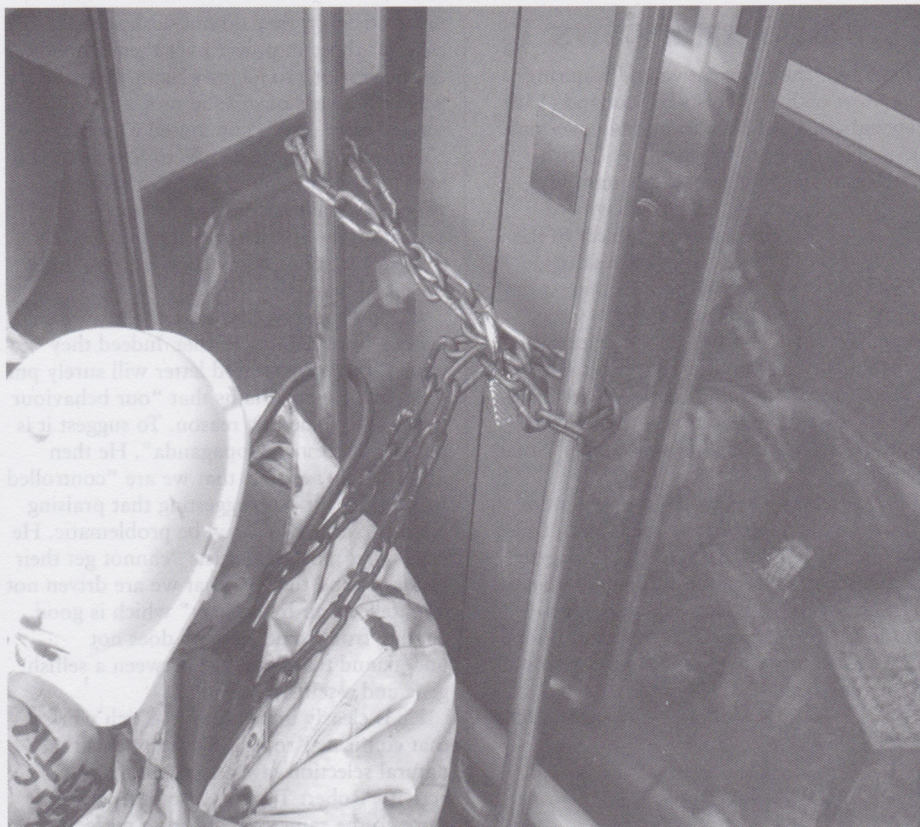
- Vahtang Devitlidze, serving two and a half years in Russia for stabbing a neo-nazi in the leg whilst defending himself from attack.
- Fabio Milan, on remand in Italy accused of fighting with the police after an anti-fascist protest.
- Andrea Neff, serving 14 months in Germany for anti-fascist activity.
- Christian Sümmermann, serving 40 months in Germany for breaching the peace whilst serving a suspended sentence issued for anti-fascist activities.
- Tomasz Wiloszewski, serving 15 years in Poland for accidentally killing a neo-nazi whilst defending himself.
- Yuri Yurevich Milevskiy, on remand in Belarus for fighting with neo-nazis. see [antifa.org.uk/pris.htm](http://antifa.org.uk/pris.htm) for details

#### MOVE

MOVE is an eco-revolutionary group who carried out protests in defence of all life. They all describe themselves as vegetarians.

- Debbie Simms Africa #006307, Janet Holloway Africa #006308 and Janine Philips Africa #006309, all at SCI Cambridge Springs, 451 Fullerton Avenue, Cambridge Springs, PA 16403-1238, USA.
- Michael Davis Africa #AM4973 and Charles Simms Africa #AM4975, both at SCI Graterford, PO Box 244, Graterford, PA 19426-0244, USA.
- Edward Goodman Africa #AM4974, SCI Mahanoy, 301 Morea Road, Frackville, PA 17932, USA.
- William Philips Africa #AM4984 and Delbert Orr Africa #AM4985, both at SCI Dallas Drawer K, Dallas, PA 18612, USA.
- Mumia Abu Jamal #AM8335, SCI Greene, 175 Progress Drive, Waynesburg PA 15370, USA.

In 1981 Mumia, former Black Panther and vocal supporter of MOVE, was framed for murdering of a cop and sentenced to death, but is currently awaiting re-sentencing after a further court hearing in 2001.



● The results of a nationwide meeting of the **Social Centres network**, incorporating owned, rented and squatted spaces, which was held recently at the Kebele building in Bristol, have gone online for public access.

Comprising groups from Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool and London, the meeting saw discussion over fostering closer ties across the network, and providing access for speakers and campaigns to create nationwide tours.

The idea of a seed fund was also mooted by the network, with a view to providing help to cash-strapped groups in organising events.

You can see the minutes online at <https://we.riseup.net/uksocialcentres/minutes>

● The annual **Class War anarchist bonfire** in London saw a showdown between around 200 revellers and a hefty police presence on November 5th which led to two arrests.

Police reputedly seized four logs as part of the operation, but were unable to stop rockets going off as they repeatedly clashed with the crowd, according to attendee Ian Bone. He wrote in his blog: "It was the most combative up for it mob we've had for some time – and it needed to be, given the sheer numbers and viciousness of the police. At the end the cops had their batons out and used pepper spray on several comrades." see [ianbone.wordpress.com](http://ianbone.wordpress.com)

● **Christiebooks**, the anarchist publishing and media group, look to have saved their online film library from deletion after offers of help and advice arrived from around the world.

Within days of an announcement that the group's 760 titles would close on 17th December due to a £26,000 bill for switching over to a

new web platform from their old service provider, they announced: "We hope to have the new site up and running as soon as the Brightcove network account goes offline on 17th December but it may take a little time to get things back to the way they were as there is a lot of re-encoding and uploading to do."

They are now looking for £500 to buy a hard-disk capable of backing up the files. Paypal payments can be sent to [christie@btclick.com](mailto:christie@btclick.com). see [christiebooks.com](http://christiebooks.com)

● Earlier this month, arms manufacturer Raytheon saw the latest action in a continuing **anti arms campaign** when activists dressed in workmen's clothes managed to get on site and one ex-soldier chained himself to the factory gates (pictured above). The group are doing regular protests from 3pm to 5pm every Thursday at Unit 510, Bristol Business Park.

● A woman arrested for singing **anti-war karaoke** outside a bomb factory has been acquitted in Brighton Magistrates court with all charges dropped.

The woman was arrested in September 2007 for singing along to an acoustic guitar at a protest outside the EDO MBM/ITT bomb factory which makes weapons for the US and UK military in Iraq. The police charged her under a council bylaw originally intended to prevent buskers and drunks from causing a disturbance.

Andrew Beckett, press spokesperson for the Smash EDO Campaign, said "the council bylaw the police used was never intended to interfere with the public's right to protest".



# Poland 1970

## A short history of the 1970-71 Polish Workers' Uprising

On 14th December 1970, thousands of workers from the Gdansk shipyards downed tools and began marching into the city. Their objective was the local regional office of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), which had ruled Poland since 1952. The protestors were met by police units and fighting between the two sides lasted into the evening.

The strike in Gdansk had been prompted by an announcement from the government that it was to increase the prices of key consumer goods – clothing, coal, food, etc. – to deal with Poland's worsening economic situation. Industrial output was lagging far behind Western Europe, agriculture was doing poorly and there was a major lack of new housing for workers. Aside from the already dire situation that the state of the economy had left many workers in, the proposed price increases would have meant a 45% reduction in real wages.

Following the march on the PZPR office in Gdansk, the urban area comprising the cities of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot (known as the *Trojmiasto*) was placed under a telecommunications block, cutting it off from the rest of the country. The next day saw the strike spread, with workers at Gdansk Harbour and the Gdansk Ship Renovation Yard stopping work. By the 16th almost all of Gdansk was on strike. A strike committee comprising workers from each striking shipyard was formed, and many areas of the shipyards were occupied. Another march on the PZPR offices was organised, and during heavy fighting with the police it was burned to the ground by strikers.

Wladyslaw Gomułka, first secretary of the PZPR, quickly ordered the army to surround the *Trojmiasto* and authorised the use of fire-arms against protestors. On 17th December, having surrounded the harbour at Gdynia, troops opened fire on a group of workers returning to the shipyard, killing or wounding hundreds. Incensed by news of the massacre, clashes erupted between protestors and the army throughout Gdynia. Workers in Szczecin, Elblag, Slupsk, Tczew, Warsaw, Wroclaw, Bialystok and Nysa walked off the job, and many of the workplaces affected were occupied by workers.

Szczecin saw violence similar to that which took place in Gdansk, with local party and union offices set on fire, the Szczecin prison and police headquarters attacked and workers fighting prolonged battles with the police. Recognising the seriousness of the situation, the government ordered the mobilisation of 5,000 police and 27,000 heavily armed troops to occupy the three cities of the *Trojmiasto*. Effectively finding themselves under martial



December 1970, demonstrating dockyard workers at Szczecin set fire PZPR offices

law, strikers were compelled to return to their jobs.

Official reports claimed that 45 people had been killed and over 1,000 wounded during the revolt, but later investigations show over 700 people were killed during fighting in Szczecin alone. It later emerged that doctors in the city had been forced to sign death certificates of victims citing they had died of 'natural causes'. Three thousand people had been arrested for taking part in the uprising.

Strikes continued in Szczecin throughout December, and mass meetings at the shipyards took place daily, leading to the election of a strike committee. The role of this committee was unclear, due in part to the majority of party members elected to it, and committee members often sought to restrain striking workers. Relations between workers and the committee grew strained with many workers feeling that the committee was ignoring decisions made at mass meetings. This often led to committee members being recalled and replaced.

Many workers grew impatient with the committee and numerous strikers urged more militant action, with steel workers threatening to sabotage their furnaces and chemical workers threatening to blow up their plants. These calls were ignored by committee members, and the strike continued in the same form into January.

In mid-January small numbers of workers began returning to work and the strike fell apart, having gained little. This period of calm ended, however, when, in what can only be described as a serious error of judgement, the government released fake newspaper and television reports claiming that shipyard

workers had promised increased productivity in support of Gierek's new leadership. The photographs and film footage released alongside the reports were of a mass meeting in the shipyard three years previously, and had been edited to include new banners and a different soundtrack.

Within 24 hours the whole of Szczecin was on strike. Workers at the Warski Shipyard occupied their yards, formed a militia to patrol the area and set up defensive measures in case of an attack by the police or army. A larger, more democratic strike committee was formed, which resolved to demand a face-to-face meeting with Gierek. The meeting took place on 24th January, and after nine hours of negotiations with workers' delegates Gierek agreed to many of their demands, including free and democratic elections to the shipyard union branch, pay for the duration of the strike, an apology and correction of the falsified news reports in the media, no victimisation of strikers and the publication of strikers' demands in newspapers. A Workers' Commission was established to oversee the implementation of the demands, to guarantee the release of arrested workers from prison and give aid to those injured in the fighting.

The 1970 uprising was the first time Polish workers had demanded changes of the regime through collective action and won. The events provided the practical experience for many Polish workers on which to base future struggles, and in particular the nationwide strikes of the late 1970s and 1980s which eventually led to the demise of the regime in 1989.

Edited from an article on Libcom.org by 'Alex'



## REVIEWS

## WHAT'S ON

## NOVEMBER

**22nd** Southampton Go Green Fair with stalls, food, workshops, kid's activities, facepainting, talks, films and more, at Avenue St Andrews Church, The Avenue, Southampton, Hampshire, SO17 1XQ from 10am until 4pm.

**27th** The Bentham Lecture 2008: Terrorism, Torture and Human Rights, by Jonathan Glover at UCL Archaeology Lecture Theatre, Gordon Square, London WC1 at 6.30pm, admission free but call the British Humanist Association on 020 7079 3580 or email [info@humanism.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism.org.uk) to reserve a place.

**29th and 30th** Anti-war gathering, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are meeting in Edinburgh – let's crash their party, see <http://edinantimil.livejournal.com> for more.

**29th** Chomsky at 80, a day of workshops and discussions with speakers including David Miller of Strathclyde University, Milan Rai, anti-war activist and editor of *Peace News*, and Leo Murray of Plane Stupid, at Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester, see [chomskyat80.org.uk](http://chomskyat80.org.uk)

**29th** Climate Camp Cymru meeting to discuss the possibility of having a camp for climate action or other types of events in Wales, at Quaker Meeting House, Dean Street, Bangor, from 10am until 5pm, email [bangor@lists.riseup.net](mailto:bangor@lists.riseup.net) for details.

**29th** 'Capitalist Decline, Financial Crisis and Revolutionary Prospects' debate with Hillel Ticktin at The Whitechapel Centre, 85 Myrdle Street, London E1 at 4pm.

**30th** Hip-hop festival at Northumbria University Students' Union featuring championship rap battles, film showing of *Inventos: Hip-Hop Cubano*, breakdance, beatboxing, deejays, with MC Stentor, Scrufz, Text Offenders and 27 Club, from 4pm until 11pm, all proceeds to the Monument 4 defence campaign – four activists unfairly fined for accepting donations to campaigns.

## DECEMBER

**1st** Conference in celebration of Chomsky's 80th birthday on 7th December, speakers include Jonathan Steele, author *Defeat: Why They Lost Iraq*; Hilary Wainwright, author *Reclaim the State*, co-editor *Red Pepper*; Milan Rai, author *Chomsky's Politics*, co-editor *Peace News*, at Artworkers Guild Hall, 6 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AT, from 7.30pm, call 020 7278 3344 or see [j-n-v.org](http://j-n-v.org) or [peacenews.info](http://peacenews.info).

**6th** National Climate March, part of the Global Day of Climate Protest halfway through the UN Climate Talks in Poznan, an important chance to influence decision makers before the Copenhagen talks in 2009 – assemble Grosvenor Square, London W1 at 12 noon, for details call 020 7833 9311 or see [www.campaigncc.org](http://www.campaigncc.org)

**6th** Glasgow Radical Independent Bookfair from 12 noon until 8pm at STUC, Woodlands Road, Glasgow, with launch of *Anarchist FAQ* by Iain McKay from 4pm until 5.30pm.

## FILM

**Gomorrah**

directed by Matteo Garrone

Wrong-footing viewers with the surreal slaughter of sleazebags in a tanning parlour, Italian Mafia drama *Gomorrah* then immediately switches gear to quasi-documentary war-reportage from the mean streets of Naples satellite suburbs – more the tragic downbeat naturalism of *The Wire*'s forensic dissection of the drugs trade than middle- or high-ranking criminal (anti-)romances like *The Godfather*, *The Sopranos*, Scorsese or *Scarface*. That the latter inspires a couple of young sociopaths here to enact their gun-toting fantasies, with predictably suicidal results, reinforces the film's ambition to reflect grass-roots reality while courting international acclaim (e.g. winning the Cannes Festival Grand Prix). Its five storylines intersect to depict the grass-roots degradation and depredation caused by Camorra clan control of daily life in the most deprived region of Western Europe – selected from a tapestry of thinly-fictionalised accounts in the best-selling novel by journalist Roberto Saviano, now under police guard for meticulously exposing what is known locally as 'The System'.

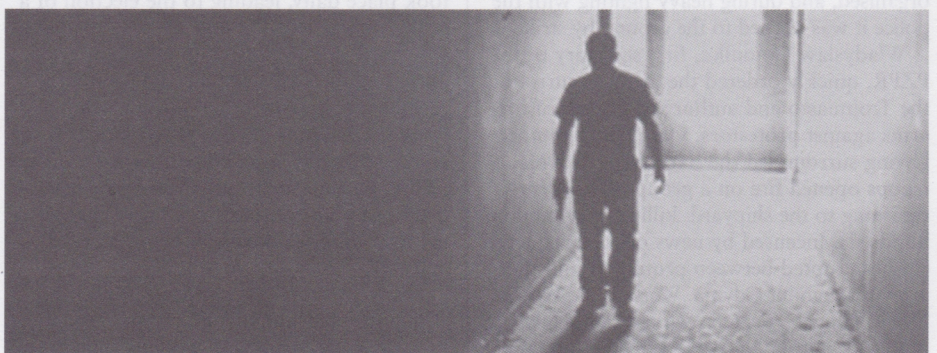
From panoramas of the Scampia public housing project in the Caserta wasteland, twitchy paranoid camerawork stalks their decaying decks following the aforementioned outlaw-wannabes: a youngster graduating from shopping-delivery to footsoldier by setting up a customer whose son turncoated to a rival 'family'; the neighbourhood 'accountant' paying remittances to imprisoned members' kinfolk (the only available 'welfare'); a talented tailor in a fake high-fashion sweatshop; and a personal assistant to a waste-disposal manager paying landowners to flytip international chemical effluent on their estates.

The palpable all-round hopelessness yields the pervasive ruination of moral, social, physical and environmental health, with few hints of agency (the clothes-designer escaping to become a trucker; the PA walking away from the patron his parents were so proud to have wangled him a career with) sugar-coating the rotten-borough desperation – the rot so comprehensively infecting the entire biosphere and lifeworld that the individual heroic villainies of Italian and Hollywood cinemas alike seem utterly irrelevant.

## This toxic thing of ours

Vividly conveying the poisonous totality of organised crime in Southern Italy, *Gomorrah* nevertheless risks resigned detachment ('Isn't it awful?') and implies correspondingly external solutions, tackling neither the phenomenon's historical development in defensive community cohesion nor its complex intrinsic entanglement with mainstream institutional structures. This is ironic given the recent refuse-collection strike in Naples and the Berlusconi government ordering military intervention in its 'war on crime' pretence – whereas the national political parties have intimately colluded with shady business, so that 'respectable society' is virtually indistinguishable from the Mafia's parallel dual-power structures (especially in Sicily, where Christian Democrat communalism dovetailed seamlessly with Cosa Nostra patronage; or the notorious interpenetration of right-wing cabals and corrupt commercial and Vatican banking). As if in recognition of its partiality, the film ends with statistics of the Camorra's economic scale (including massive investment in New York's rebuilding at Ground Zero) – leaving audiences to infer the universal toxicity of government-by-capitalism and the futility of expecting its guardians to act against it.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)



## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. American author, oral historian and activist Studs Terkel who died in October.
2. The Maldives, where the first democratic government has said it will set aside funds to buy land in other countries because of fears of sea level rising. The highest point in the Maldives

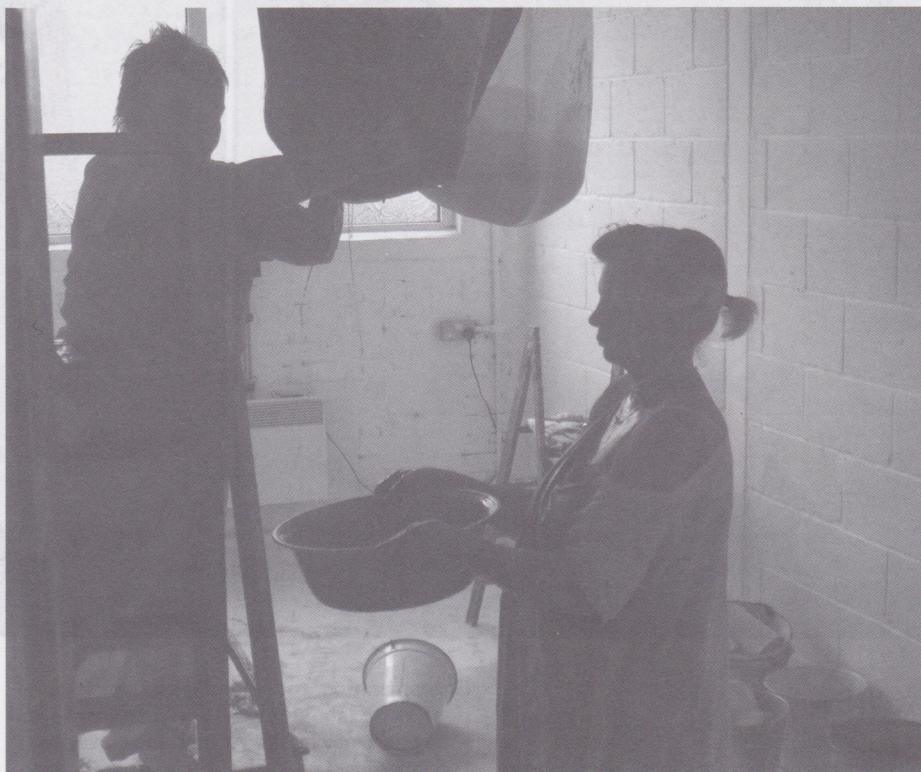
- is 2.4 metres above sea level.
3. *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss. She describes the workers as Bolsheviks.
4. Switzerland, because it failed to loan them 60 railway locomotives. Its foreign affairs deputy, Dr Franz Lipp, had spent some time in psychiatric hospitals.



# The art of food processing

**This performance artwork powerfully evokes the blood, sweat and tears of the nurturance underpinning social reproduction, according to Tom Jennings**

For over an hour in the Saltburn Gallery, Cleveland, two women methodically undertake what appear to be food-processing operations, struggling up stepladders, pouring red fruit-mash and cream into gigantic hanging muslin bags, kneading and squeezing the strained residues into jugs and buckets. This onerous task yields increasing quantities of liquids then refiltered through the system and, as time passes, the products accidentally splatter across the floor and walls and the artists themselves who become more and more bedraggled – occasionally even rinsing their heads and mouths with the juices – until the entire scene suggests a horror movie shoot. When their discomfort at the smell and feel of the sticky substances mingling and stinging eyes, filling hair and covering bodies becomes too much, the visibly tiring women abandon their travails – leaving a random mosaic of bright purples, reds and pinks among discarded containers in the once-clean white space. Nevertheless they soon reappear with only the worst of the mess washed off, in an adjacent room holding tables set with massed ranks of delicate china. Preparing cuppas and scones with blackberry and apple jam and cream, they serve the audience afternoon tea.



Initiating Saltburn Artists Project's live art programme, Carole Luby and Sally Madge's *Labour Intensive* (12th October) condenses a whole gamut of traditional 'women's work' into a simple installation. Starting from deeply personal resonances of specific domestic rituals harnessing wild food into cottage economics, the exhausting routines of housework and family sustenance take their toll inscribed on bodies and souls – the gradual saturation with vivid blood-red and off-white rotting, festering excretions connoting menstruation, maturation and childbirth, bodily care, damage and ageing, in cycles of biological and social reproduction. Pleasure and fulfilment arise from the sheer sensuality of visceral engagement and commitment to motherly objectives, but the overriding sense here is ambivalence – visually, in the grotesque beauty; and emotionally, in the artists' abjection, pain and melancholy, wrung-out of energy from lifetimes of loving care. The manipulation of raw environmental and bodily material thus threatens to overwhelm human capacities to cope with the flow and distil the boundless potential of the world into useful, nourishing essence – with the monstrous jam-manufacturing machinery hinting at industrial alienation, and the subsequent tea-party completing the fragmentation of integrated productive activity in service-sector commodification.

## Denatured nurture debate

The themes tackled signal the influence of feminist art since the 1960s – for example, Judy Chicago's celebratory *The Dinner Party*

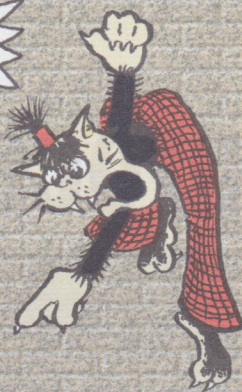
and Bobby Baker's deranged renderings of respectable housewifery. Whereas, if later conceptual explorations of the ideologies and stereotypes of womanhood are only implicit, another blatant precursor would be the macho provocations of the Vienna Actionists, transgressing acceptable bounds of public behaviour and encouraging extremes of fascination and disgust. Meanwhile the exaggerated dysfunctional apparatus reinforces the artifice of this situation – militating against interpretations of gender essentialism – and the art gallery setting further frames the performance within institutional discourses rather than 'natural' activity. Moreover the structure of the space itself prompts voyeuristic peering through a narrow doorway, placing centre-stage endeavours normally culturally hidden, socially taken for granted and politically undervalued. Thus the concealed 'internal' effects of this everyday hard labour are symbolically transposed: first onto the performers' bodies; then the building's surfaces; and finally into the reactions of viewers – who were clearly moved, even though some accepted the gift of nourishment while others preferred to pass.

But beyond its expressive sophistication and effectiveness, *Labour Intensive* neatly brings together production and consumption – both in the artistic process, challenging the objectifying gaze of detached contemplation, and the culmination of its circuit of social relations implicating 'customers' directly in preceding events. And, of course – contrary



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## THE QUIZ

1. Who "never met a picket line or petition I didn't like"?
2. Which country is trying to buy itself out of the effects of climate change?
3. Which grammatical bestseller was dedicated to striking Russian printers whose demand for payment for punctuation marks led to the 1905 revolution?
4. On whom did the short lived Bavarian Soviet Republic (1919) declare war and why?

Answers on page 14

The Anarchist Quiz Book by Martin Howard is available at £5 (post free) from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

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## Review

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to conservative rhetoric sanctifying isolated nuclear families and regulating and rewarding individual conduct – the complex rhythms and rites surrounding food and care-giving always were collective. Communal traditions involving highly-skilled craft originated, developed and were transmitted at the grass-roots, largely outside centralised control, yet a constant source of anxiety and interference. Such stubbornly persistent patterns of basic human sociality need taming, breaking down and reconstituting if their potential utility for elite interests is to be mobilised, regimented and exploited. So from the enclosures of the commons and the destruction of tribal and subsistence cultures, through mass industrial

incarceration, to the soulless colonisation of 'affective labour' in the 'social factory' – and now in biotechnology's rapacious invasion of cellular life – prevailing modes of production, reproduction and domination seem to consistently intersect most crucially and fruitfully precisely where women's wisdom and bodily practices loom largest. Sally Madge and Carole Luby do some justice to these mysteries in their contemporary arts sphere, but our general political project is surely to transcend all of the mystifications and material realisations of oppression – whether these privilege female or patriarchal superiority, or valorise surplus money or power.

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A DVD recording by Joe Price of *Labour Intensive* is currently in production, and the artists plan to repeat the live performance at other venues in 2009.

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# Private profits, social risks



chance of loss but with an unlimited chance of gain.

This is an interesting double-standard. It suggests that corporations are not, in fact, owned by shareholders at all since they take on none of the responsibility of ownership, especially the responsibility to pay back debts. Why should they have the privilege of getting profit during good times when they take none of the responsibility during bad times? Corporations are creatures of government, created with the social privileges of limited financial liability of shareholders. Since their debts are ultimately public, why should their profits be private?

This reducing of risk is not limited to individual states, it is applied internationally as well. Big banks and corporations lend money to developing nations but "the people who borrowed the money (i.e. the local elite) aren't held responsible for it. It's the people ... who have to pay (the debts) off ... The lenders are protected from risk. That's one of the main functions of the IMF, to provide risk free insurance to people who lend and invest in risky loans. They earn high yields because there's a lot of risk, but they don't have to take the risk, because it's socialised." (Noam Chomsky, *Propaganda and the Public Mind*, page 125)

Capitalism has developed precisely by externalising risk and placing the burden onto other parties – suppliers, creditors, workers and, ultimately, society as a whole. To then turn round and justify corporate profits in terms of risk seems to be hypocritical in the extreme, particularly by appealing to examples of small business people whom usually face

the burdens caused by corporate externalising of risk.

Doug Henwood further notes in this context that the "signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts for little or nothing as a source of finance," making the argument for risk as a defence of profits seem extremely weak. (*Wall Street*, pages 293 and 292)

As David Schweickart points out: "In the vast majority of cases, when you buy stock, you give your money not to the company but to another private individual. You buy your share of stock from someone who is cashing in his share. Not a nickel of your money goes to the company itself. The company's profits would have been exactly the same, with or without your stock purchase." (*After Capitalism*, page 37)

"In spite of the stock market's large symbolic value, it is notorious that it has relatively little to do with the production of goods and services," notes David Ellerman. "The overwhelming bulk of stock transactions are in second-hand shares so the capital paid for shares usually goes to other stock traders, not to productive enterprises issuing new shares." (*The Democratic worker-owned firm*, page 199)

In other words, most investment is simply the 'risk' associated with buying a potential income stream in an uncertain world. The buyer's action has not contributed to producing that income stream in any way whatsoever yet it results in a claim on the labour of others.

New wealth flows from production, the use of labour on existing wealth to create new wealth.

In fact, the stock market (and the risk it is based on) harms this process. The notion that dividends represent the return for 'risk' may be faulted by looking at how the markets operate in reality, rather than in theory. Stock markets react to recent movements in the price of stock markets, causing price movements to build upon price movements. According to academic finance economist Bob Haugen, this results in inherently unstable finance markets, with such price-driven volatility accounting for over three-quarters of the spikes and dips reported.

This leads to the market directing investments very badly as some investment is wasted in over-valued companies and under-valued firms cannot get finance to produce useful goods. The market's volatility reduces the overall level of investment as investors will only fund projects with a sufficiently high level of return. This results in a serious drag on economic growth. As such, 'risk' has a large and negative impact on the real economy and it seems ironic to reward such behaviour.

Given that the capitalists (or their hired managers) have a monopoly of decision both as buyers on the market through their superior information and buying power, and within firms, any risks made by a company reflects that hierarchy. As such, risk and the ability to take risks are monopolised in a few hands.

If profit is the product of risk then, ultimately, it is the product of a hierarchical company